REMOTE MONITORING AND CONTROL METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR AN INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

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CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of U.S. provisional Application Serial No. (Attorney Docket No. 19880-003800), entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR INTERACTIVE PROGRAM GUIDE AND ADVERTISING SYSTEM," filed November 27, 2000, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety for all purposes.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to communication systems in general. More specifically, the invention relates to techniques to efficiently deliver interactive program guide (IPG) and other multimedia information in a server-centric system.

Over the past few years, the television industry has seen a transformation in a variety of techniques by which its programming is distributed to consumers. Cable television systems are doubling or even tripling system bandwidth with the migration to hybrid fiber coax (HFC) cable plant. Direct broadcast satellite (DBS) systems have also emerged as a viable alternative to customers unwilling to subscribe to local cable systems. A variety of other approaches have also been attempted, which focus primarily on high bandwidth digital technologies, intelligent two-way set top terminals, or other methods to try to offer services differentiated from those of standard cable and over-the-air broadcast systems.

For a system designed to distribute information (e.g., programming, guide data, and so on) to a large number of terminals, it is very important to maintain the system up and running at all times and to minimize down time. This typically requires constant (24-hour) monitoring of the operational status of the system elements, spotting for potential problems, and correcting any problems that may arise. Technician and/or other personnel may be employed on-site to stand on alert and to remedy any problems that may arise.

However, in certain instances, the necessary personnel may not be available on-site to monitor the system. Moreover, the on-site personnel may require additional assistance from other personnel whom may be located off-site. For these and